

The Museums Association (MA) is the largest membership organisation representing museums and those that work in them in the UK.

The MA's Museums Change Lives campaign has been running for three years and is our vision for the increased social impact that museums can deliver (<http://museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives/25062013-the-vision>).

Its main themes are that museums of all type and scale can, enhance health and wellbeing, help create better places to live and work, and inspire ideas and people.

There is ample evidence that museums can boost people's quality of life and improve mental and physical health. It is proven to be good for wellbeing to engage closely with collections and ideas in the presence of other people.

Museums can help improve the lives of those that are excluded and marginalised and may have health issues as a result: unemployed and homeless people; isolated older people; people of all ages with mental health issues; and looked-after children.

Museums are also increasingly finding targeted ways to serve people with specific health needs, such as those with dementia or in hospitals or care homes. As the population ages, museums can do more to help improve the quality of older people's lives.

The best museums provide meaningful opportunities for participation and work in partnership with communities and in doing so can influence health and wellbeing outcomes.

The MA provides guidance and best practice examples of this work to the sector and is part of the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing. The MA also provides seminars and training in topics associated with health and wellbeing.

Many museums work in this arena already as the case studies on the MA's website testify: (<http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives/case-studies/wellbeing>)

However there are opportunities for many more museums to be actively involved in delivering health and wellbeing benefits for individuals and communities.



Some of the following issues are barriers to museums engaging in this area of work:

- Lack of capacity
- An extremely challenging financial climate where year on year cuts have seen substantial reductions in workforce numbers;
- Project funding: work on health and wellbeing is often project funded which can mean it is not embedded or seen as core work;
- Skills gaps in health, wellbeing and other community-focused areas of museum practice;
- Lack of experience working with the health sector and third sector organisations;
- Lack of leadership commitment within institutions to drive this area of work;
- Lack of a clear funding stream: none of the main funders for the sector directly fund this area of work.

Some references:

Mental health: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/museums-and-mental-health>

Homelessness: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/homelessness>

Dementia: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/new-practice/09112015-alzheimers-society-publishes-dementia-friendly-arts-guide>

Health: <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/publications/mind-body-spirit-report>

Evaluation: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/01102015-health-wellbeing-and-collections>

National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing:
<https://museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com>

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